

Canine Bulletin

Nebraska Task Force - 1

March 2003

Columbia Shuttle Incident

Submitted by: Elaine Sawtell

It was déjà vu ñ Oklahoma City 1999 all over again. Ditto, Louie, and Max on a special US&R mission for FEMA. As always, the three veterans graciously took their handlers along.

We met in Houston and traveled the 90 miles to Lufkin, where the first day was the usual waiting. We visited with the other dog teams: six from California, Heidi Yamaguchi, and Sonja Heritage from Virginia, and Ed Wolff from Florida.

Our first night was spent in a church camp bunkhouse; nine women in one, the three male handlers, along with the IST team, in another.

The next morning, after being assigned to TXTF1 STMs, we traveled another 60 miles to Hemphill and the command post, set up in the local volunteer fire department. This is a trip we would make twice a day for the remainder of the mission.

The solemnity and size of the task soon became apparent. The phrase ñneedle in a haystackî was often heard.

From the beginning I wondered how to explain to Ditto, ñYou're not looking for a tooth in ten acres, or a body two feet deep, buried three years ago. You're looking for heroes fallen from the sky.î She started and completed every search, day after day, in the precise, methodical way she does all her searching.

Ditto, Louie, and Max never worked an area together. We all had our own challenges. For Ditto and I, it was the thorns. After one particularly bad day in the brush, I began telling people Hershel had beat me up. It was obvious someone or something had.

Louie and Amy encountered a herd of javelinas and lived to tell about it. Our IST leader at Hemphill, a self-proclaimed ñdog haterî until this deployment, summed it up when he said, ñLouie kicked butt.î At the end of five days, I finally saw Louie looking, well, a little tired. I think.

Hershel and Max worked really hard. They earned the dubious distinction of being the only canine team to get

lost. Of course, if Hershel had been handling the GPS instead of the FBI, we're all sure it wouldn't have happened ñ fairly certain, at least.

On most of our searches we were accompanied by a flanker for navigation, a medic, anywhere from eight to fifteen FBI, DMORT, and assorted others. We searched for as long as six hours, day after day, usually in a cold rain, through east Texas piney woods, fields, swamps, bog, and the ever present thorns.

The second evening and for the remainder of the deployment we were lodged at what was once a very nice motel. Those days had long since passed. Many handlers chose to sleep in the sleeping bags FEMA supplied for the church camp instead of between the motel sheets. But at least we had private rooms. This was to be our home for the next nine days.

The IST team for the first time included a veterinarian, Pat Grant from California. She equipped a room at the motel for our use any time with dryers and towels, first aid equipment, and was

available every evening to treat any injuries ñ mostly thorns, swamp feet and ticks ñ and make sure the dogs were warm and dry.

We traveled by car, humvee, and boats to islands on Toledo Bend, and Hershel and Max got their first ride in a helicopter.

Our mission was not shuttle debris. But at times we were surrounded by it. With every piece, I could see and hear in my mind Columbia streaking overhead. More than once I had to remind myself my job was to watch my dog and focus on our mission ñ not look for shuttle parts.

We worked five long days. Fresh teams came in over the weekend. We rehab'd and rested on Monday, our 7th day into the mission, then went back to work two more days.

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An Opinion

Submitted by: Elaine Sawtell

We've known it since Oklahoma City. Some of us knew it before. Death is as much a part of disaster as life is often in the FEMA US&R program experience, more.

Very rarely have our dogs had the opportunity to fulfill their live find mission. By the time we get to a site, there are no survivors.

Inevitably, where there is hope of life, there is also death. In America we've always known the importance of returning the dead to their families. As the FEMA US&R mission expands, the canine component can and must fulfill specialized roles to meet new challenges.

Standards must remain high for our live find dogs. Dogs can be trained to search for a spark of life through chaos and contamination, debris and death, noise and confusion until they find that live human scent, then stay with that scent and bark. It's the whole goal of the mission. We've been training our dogs to do it for years. There is no reason to accept or allow anything but solid victim loyalty from our live find dogs.

As we can and have trained proficiency and commitment into our live search dogs, we can do the same with human remains dogs. They can develop the commitment to their job and the endurance to persevere through distractions and confusion. They can give a solid alert on the object of their mission. Agility, off-lead control, directability, all the things we ask of our live find dogs we can ask of our human remains search dogs.

To ask a dog to do both jobs is possible. Those of us with wilderness search background have done that for years. But when dead and live

combined in a large scale disaster, the picture changes. Careful, consistent, ongoing training and teamwork from canine and handler is imperative. The alerts must be different, and the dog must be sure of his mission.

In Nebraska, we have set problems with victims unknown to the dogs, with no toys or food, in rubble along with human remains. The canine is sent on a cadaver search and must switch to and commit to a live find when appropriate. In training it works, but in the reality of a disaster, with the distractions and scent picture we can never duplicate in training, when dogs and handlers are tired and under pressure, alerts will blur and mistakes will be made. The weakest link here is not the canine but his ability to communicate to his human partner exactly what his nose tells him.

The worst case scenario is, of course, a missed survivor while someone who did not survive is being recovered.

In east Texas, FEMA was fortunate. The FEMA dogs in Texas, with some notable exceptions, were our veterans. Many were wilderness search dogs with cadaver certifications and finds before the FEMA US&R disaster search canine standard was even implemented. They are used long days with little or no success, used to persevering and enduring, covering ground. Some of you may remember that a Mission Ready Wilderness Search Dog used to be a requirement for a FEMA US&R dog. But that page



Ditto in Texas.

has long ago been turned in our history.

If we respond with a knee jerk reaction and throw our live find dogs into cadaver work, we are asking for confusion. It could ruin a live find dog. The answer seems obvious. Develop teams trained only on human remains. Assign them to task forces along with live find teams. Hopefully, a human remains standard would be more than simply running into a rubble pile and alerting on a scent source. Hopefully, endurance would be factored in. Maybe a two-day test with a variety of HR scent sources, blank areas, all areas with distractions. We have a good live find standard. We can develop a good human remains standard.

A well trained canine is still the best search tool FEMA has. But to use this tool to its best advantage the mission must be crystal clear to the dog. We owe it to our canines and to the FEMA system to maintain our credibility by careful thought at this critical juncture of our program and our country's history.

New Challenges

Submitted by: Elaine Sawtell

"The same creator who names the stars knows the name of the seven souls we mourn today..." President Bush, February 1, 2003

With these words, once again in the FEMA US&R canine mission was faced with a new challenge.

It wasn't the first time FEMA activated only canine teams for a mission. Canines were sent to Guam after an airliner crashed. In 1999, eight US&R canine teams, with Search Team Manager support, were sent to Oklahoma City in the wake of devastating Force 5 tornadoes.

But there the similarity ends. In Oklahoma City, we searched rubble ñ blocks and blocks of it.

In east Texas, the search area was measured in miles. Much of it was thick woods and brush, thorns, swamps and bogs. In addition to the terrain, hazards included ticks, javelinas and an occasional snake.

In all, 23 FEMA teams participated. With the exception to two Texas task force teams, who had task force personnel, the first teams in (from California, Florida Task Force 2, Nebraska and Virginia), came with no STM support. However, flankers from Search One, a Dallas based SAR group, many of whose members are also Texas Task Force members, provided us with excellent navigational and logistical support.

Basically, we as dog handlers left the navigation to our flankers, allowing us to concentrate on working our dogs and thus greatly increasing our productivity (and peace of mind ñ only one handler got lost!) Texas Task Force STMs Susan Brown at Hemphill, and later Barry Larsen, and Bill Parker at San Augustine assigned our missions and interfaced with FEMA IST, NASA, FBI, and DMORT to make a seemingly impossible task run smoothly.

Later teams, arriving from Tennessee, Maryland, Massachusetts, Washington and Florida Task Force 1, for the most part brought STMs to serve as flankers for their canine handlers.

Another innovation was the inclusion on the IST team of veterinarian and canine handler Pat Grant from California. Not only were we able to have a vet on site who understands working dogs, but Pat was a valuable liaison between the IST and canines as needs arose and the mission continued.

All canine handlers appreciate the IST's recognition of the need for a canine voice in this cabinet level position.

In the field our dogs worked long hours under trying conditions, covering vast areas, often accompanied by eight to fifteen FBI and DMORT personnel, sometimes by an entire troop of Texas National Guardsmen.

Will there ever be another mission like the Columbia recover? We pray not. But we owe it to the FEMA US&R system to provide canines with specialized training. We owe it to our dogs to not put them in situations they are not trained for or capable of performing.

How Do I Submit Items for the Canine Bulletin

Mail, E-mail, or Fax items to:

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Lincoln Fire & Rescue

1801 "Q" Street

Lincoln, NE 68508

jmarget@ci.lincoln.ne.us

Fax: 441-8292

Phone: 441-8352

Address/

Phone #

Changes Also
contact Julie



Remember to mail your
training logs to:
Susie Songster
1801 "Q" Street
Lincoln, NE 68508



How Many Dogs Does it Take to Change a Lightbulb?

Golden Retriever: The sun is shining, the day is young, we've got our whole lives ahead of us, and you're inside worrying about a stupid burned out bulb?

Border Collie: Just one. And then I'll replace any wiring that's not up to code.

Dachshund: You know I can't reach that stupid lamp!

Bichon Frise: Oh hurry, someone fix the lights so I can see to style my fur!

Rottweiler: Make me.

Lab: Oh, me, me!!!!!! Pleeeeeeeeeeeeze let me change the light bulb! Can I? Can I? Huh? Huh? Huh? Can I?

German Shepherd: I'll change it as soon as I've led these people from the dark, check to make sure I haven't missed any, and make just one more perimeter patrol to see that no one has tried to take advantage of the situation.

Tibetan Terrier: Let the Border Collie do it. You can feed me while he's busy.

Jack Russell Terrier: I'll just pop it in while I'm bouncing off the walls and furniture.

Poodle: I'll just blow in the Border Collie's ear and he'll do it. By the time he finishes rewiring the house, my nails will be dry.

Cocker Spaniel: Why change it? I can still pee on the carpet in the dark.

Doberman: While it's dark, I'm going to sleep on the couch.

Boxer: Who cares? I can still play with my squeaky toys in the dark...

Chihuahua: Yo quiero Taco Bulb.

Irish Wolfhound: Can somebody else do it? I've got this hangover...

Pointer: I see it, there it is, there it is, right there.....

Greyhound: It isn't moving. Who cares?

Australian Shepherd: First, I'll put all the light bulbs in a little circle....

Old English Sheep Dog: Light bulb? I'm sorry, but I don't see a light bulb.

Hound Dog: ZZZZZZZ.Z.Z.Z.Z.Z.Z.Z....Z....Z....Z....

Cat: Dogs do not change light bulbs. People change light bulbs. So, the question is: How long will it be before I can expect light?

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NASA made the decision, and the mission ended early afternoon on Thursday, February 12. Recovery was complete.

By Friday we were in full demob and receiving the usual accolades for a job well done. At the airport, Hershel and I said goodbye to Amy and Louie at the American terminal. We were slightly euphoric as we headed for the ticket counter to begin the trip home. We were brought back to reality as the American Airlines ticket agent snarled, "You can't take that dog on the plane."

Some things never change and, as Hershel says, humility is a good thing.



Jim Yeager helps Louie back into the boat after combing a remote island in the Toledo Bend reservoir in Texas.

Bob Deeds, Elaine, Ditto, Amy, Louie, and Jim Yeager.



Hershel and Max get their first helicopter ride.

Terriers Recruited for Hi-Tech Rescue Role

BBC News, December 28, 2002

A rescue organization is drafting in terriers to help in the life-or-death battle to find disaster victims in the shell of collapsed buildings.

It is believed to be the first time the dog breed has been used in the race to save people trapped by fallen masonry or brickwork after an earthquake or terrorist outrage.

The north Wales-based charity Global Rescue Service is to train six terrier pups for the task for going underground equipped with microchip equipment which will allow them to be tracked from the surface.

And the half of the new recruits - said to be the perfect size for delving through the spaces created when building fall down - are to start their professional life with New York's fire service.

Volunteers at Global Rescue Services have been involved worldwide in the rescue of disaster and earthquake victims.

But the highly-trained dogs they are used to are usually bigger breeds such as collies and labradors.

The training venture the charity has begun is called The Terrarius Project, from the Latin for 'earth dog'.

It has already selected five candidates, picked from terrier families with a good history as working dogs and the instinct to 'go to ground' to find its target.

Organizer David Jones, 51, said: 'This should advance the search technique for disaster 20 years.'

'I've had this idea for many years - the expertise with the dogs has been there but the technology hasn't.

'But it has advanced so much in the past two or three years, that I think it will work.'

The idea is to kit out the animals with equipment which can be tracked and monitored from the surface, allowing their handlers to know what the dogs have found and where.

The scheme is a joint project with the New York's Office of Fire Prevention and Control which wants to increase its ability to find people who may be trapped underground.

Mr. Jones said: 'There will still be a role for Labradors and retrievers as surface dogs.'

'The problem is with the voids that nobody can get into - you wouldn't get a German Shepherd or a collie in there because they are too big.'

'The plan is that each dog will be chipped so we will know where they are within a collapsed building to within two feet.'

He said new tracking equipment - combined with digitized blueprints of buildings - would allow the monitors on the surface to track the animals even through 50 ft. of concrete rubble.

If a terrier located a body or a survivor, a microphone would allow its handler to know what it had discovered.

'Instead of ripping a whole building apart to find there is nothing in it, we would know exactly what part of the building it was in.'

Loud Noises

'It will save endless amount of man-hours and machinery.'

The dogs' training is to start at the end of January and take about 18 months to complete.

Two will be trained as cadaver dogs - locators of bodies - one of which will be sent to New York.

The six terriers will be put through their paces in abandoned buildings on a mountainside at Penmaenmawr, north Wales, as well as in the many disused quarries in the area.

Their training will include being made used to noise such as banging and loud machinery in order to be able to work at disaster sites without being disturbed.

'It will be like a game for them,' said Mr. Jones.

Pager Number Change

Submitted by: Deborah Goodman

Please be advised that I have a new pager number reserved strictly for deployment call outs and other emergencies. My national pager company went bankrupt, so this is a local pager only. Please also call my cell phone to reach me for a deployment or emergency.

Pager: (417) 832-3795

Cell: (417) 861-5709